

(Orn. Beitr. Faun. Madag. p. 23) in referring this well-marked species to the genus *Bubo*; but it unquestionably belongs to *Otus*.

M. Pollen states (*loc. cit.*) that he saw a still larger Horned Owl in Madagascar, which he mentions in connexion with this species, but he unfortunately did not succeed in obtaining a specimen of it.

I may in conclusion add that, in company with M. Verreaux, I have vainly searched in the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes for a specimen of *Melierax musicus* mentioned by Dr. Hartlaub (Orn. Beitr. Faun. Madag. p. 19) as having been procured in Madagascar and contained in that collection. As no examples of that species appear now to exist there, except such as have been obtained in South Africa, it seems probable that some accidental error has occurred in Dr. Hartlaub's remark on this subject.

XLII.—*Letters, Announcements, &c.*

THE following letters addressed "To the Editor of 'The Ibis'" have been received:—

SIR,—Some of the habits of the Red-wattled Lapwing of India (*Lobivanellus goensis*) are so curious that, even if generally known to your readers, they may bear repetition, while the singular places selected by it for breeding appear to me not to have been mentioned by any one.

The judge's court-house at Manipur is a large building with a terrace-roof of plaster beaten flat. Beneath it are also the courts of several other officers; and it is frequented by from four to five hundred people daily. A broad ladder leads to the top of the building, which is surrounded by trees and adjoins a large swampy barren piece of land such as the Lapwing loves.

While sitting in court I have often heard Lapwings making a great outcry; but I never guessed the cause, until, on inquiry, I found that, for the last three or four years at least, a pair had selected the bare terrace-roof to breed. They always chose the same spot for their nest—a little heap of lime rubbish about a couple of feet across; and in a very slight hollow in the top of

this I found two of their eggs, which almost exactly resemble those of their English namesake. This habit is the more strange, as the Kites (*Milvus govinda*) generally succeed in carrying off their newly-hatched young. I ordered the birds not to be disturbed, and watched them with some curiosity; for I had thought that they always frequented the most lonely and barren places for the purpose of breeding.

On July 1st, 1865, I went up the ladder to the top of the court-house, peeped quietly over the parapet, and saw the Lapwing sitting on her two eggs. Gently she slipped off and crept lowly along for two or three yards, when she lifted herself up, and, flying slowly, alighted a little lower, on the next ledge, pretending to think I had not seen her two eggs, exposed as they were on the heap of mortar. On July 3rd, when the heat on the roof was so intense that one could scarcely bear to touch the plaster, the eggs were hatched; but on the 6th, when sitting in court in the afternoon, I heard a tremendous outcry of the parents, and sending to the roof I found that the Kites had swooped down and carried off the chicks. This occurs again and again, and yet the birds persist in laying in the same place.

On July 9th, 1866, I happened to go to the roof of my own house, which is flat and terraced like that of the court-house. There I saw four eggs of this Lapwing lying on the smooth plaster in the middle of the terrace. There was no trace of a nest, save a curious line of little bits of plaster, forming an irregular circle six or eight inches in diameter; but the pieces collected were not numerous. My man suggested that they were placed to prevent the eggs rolling about with the wind in the parents' absence; and this seems to be very likely. These eggs were never hatched, although the parents were most attentive, but were, one by one, carried off by the Crows (*Corvus culminatus*), which are ever on the look-out for the eggs of other birds.

Again, one day in July 1867, I was with your correspondents Mr. W. E. Brooks and Mr. Allan Hume on a trolley on the railway, when the former pointed out many Lapwings' nests on the metalling of the road, close to the very rails on which trains were constantly running. The line is ballasted with broken

limestone, the smaller pieces of which the birds seem to have brought together, and with them to have formed a nest, if it can be so called. As the trolly came up, each bird slipped off her eggs, and, having gone a little way, stood still, staring at us to attract our attention. Four nests were so found within two miles.

This species is very common throughout the whole of the North-west Provinces. It is ordinarily known to Europeans as the "Peewit," and, as mentioned by Dr. Jerdon (B. Ind. iii. p. 649), has many nicknames derived from its cry. The natives have many stories about it; that of its sleeping on its back to support the sky, which once fell on one of its ancestors, quoted by the Doctor as being current in Southern India, is equally so in the North-west*. It would be curious to trace the origin of this belief.

I remain, &c.,

C. HORNE.

Upper Norwood, June 5, 1869.

Agra, June 12, 1869.

SIR,—Since I last wrote, another novelty has come to hand. My friend Colonel Delme-Ratcliffe wrote from Attock that he had two Grosbeaks, not included in Dr. Jerdon's work, and that he could not make them out. He has lately sent them to me to name; and what should appear but our old familiar friend the Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes vulgaris*, Steph.), whose nest and eggs formed the especial treasure of my boyhood's collection! The Hawfinch has been recorded from China and Japan, but never before from India. Attock, where these birds were procured (early in May, I believe), is our north-western frontier post.

I am, &c.,

A. O. HUME.

Etawah, July 12, 1869.

SIR,—A friend of mine, Mr. Buck, of Cawnpore, has just returned from a trip to the Sutlej valley, and at two places he procured a specimen of *Reguloides proregulus*, a species I have

* [It is also told of this species, or the allied *Lobivanellus atronuchalis*, in Burmah. Cf. Ibis, 1868, p. 390.—ED.]

never shot in this neighbourhood or at Cawnpore. This bird, as Dr. Jerdon observes, has a "canary-yellow" rump, or a broad light greenish-yellow band across the lower part of the back, which contrasts sharply with the general olive-green of the back and upper surface. The termination of the olive of the back is very abrupt, and not at all shaded into the yellow of the rump, as is shown in the woodcut in Yarrell's 'British Birds' (3rd ed. i. p. 380), where a figure of this species is given to illustrate another one (*R. superciliosus*), which has been so often confounded with it. The upper surface, from the head to the rump, is darker olive in *R. proregulus* than in *R. viridipennis*; and in the former the axillaries and under wing-coverts are very bright primrose-yellow, while the same parts in the latter are emphatically pale—positive yellow occurring at the ridge of the wings only. In *R. proregulus*, the outer webs of the tail-feathers are of a much brighter yellowish-green; but the wings in the two birds are very much alike; so are the heads, except that, as I have already said, that of *R. proregulus* is the darkest above. In this last the bill is somewhat stronger than in the other species, and the upper mandible and tip of the lower are very much darker in colour, being quite of a blackish-brown; its legs and feet are also darker. The occipital streak in both is very conspicuous, and of the same dull yellow colour; but the superciliary streaks are of a brighter and clearer yellow in most of my specimens of *R. viridipennis* than in the two of *R. proregulus* which I have examined. Dr. Jerdon (B. Ind. ii. p. 198) remarks of *R. viridipennis* that it is readily distinguished from "*R. chloronotus*," i. e. *R. proregulus* (cf. Ibis, 1867, p. 26), "by the rump being concolorous with the back." This I have not found, as a rule, to be the case, the rump being much lighter in colour, but gradually shading into the darker hue of the back. In one specimen that I have, the rump is of the same colour as the back; but all the others have light rumps, though not of a positive yellow.

The places where Mr. Buck procured *R. proregulus* are Rogee and Chenec. He did not succeed in finding its nest. The other species of *Reguloides* met with by him were *R. occipitalis*

and *R. trochiloides*, the latter being the most numerous. The former has a stouter bill than the latter, and is generally paler in colour, with indistinct wing-bands. The only nest found was one of *R. occipitalis*, built not on the ground, but under the rafter of a house and inside one of the rooms! The bird had young in the beginning of June. Many young birds were observed, principally of *R. trochiloides*. I was disappointed at his not meeting with *R. superciliosus*; but it is a species easily overlooked until one is familiar with its call-note; and then it can be procured in hundreds, though, active and restless as it is, it hides very much in the thick foliage of large trees. It is such an exceedingly common bird in the plains, that wherever it does breed it must do so plentifully. Perhaps for this purpose it goes more in the direction of Nepal.

Mr. Buck brought several other birds, and took about a dozen kinds of eggs,—those of *Francolinus vulgaris*, *Emberiza fucata*, and *E. cia* among others. He has left with me a Sparrow, shot high up on one of the hills, which I cannot find in Dr. Jerdon's book. *Carpodacus erythrinus* he found close under the snows. I wish I could get away, some spring and summer, to the same district; what a collection I would make!

I am, &c.,

W. E. BROOKS.

South-African Museum, Cape Town,
July 27th, 1869.

SIR,—In 'The Ibis' for 1866 (p. 209), I see a notice of Herr von Pelzeln's remarks on the variation in the plumage of certain birds, and I am induced to place on record an example of melanism which has come on under my very eyes.

I have had in my aviary for some time several Java Sparrows, *Padda oryzivora* (Linn.), which have bred with me. One of these birds, I believe the oldest, about a year or eighteen months ago assumed, on moulting, a very decided dark tinge over the whole plumage; but the white streaks totally disappeared, and the whole head became black. This bird is now failing in health, and frequently drops from its perch, which it can with difficulty regain. I believe that old age, and the weak-

ness arising therefrom, has caused the change of colour. Some time ago I saw a pair of similar birds in the possession of a gentleman in this town: on asking after them lately, I was told that they had died, of no particular disease.

In the same aviary with my bird is an example of the Australian *Poephila cineta*, Gould, which I brought with me from Melbourne in 1862. This shows unmistakable signs of having arrived at a good old age: the whole of its plumage is turning to a dull sooty colour, especially the light grey of the head, which is becoming a darkish blue-black.

A neighbour had an English Blackbird, *Turdus merula*, for a number of years. He came one day to tell me that the bird, which had been moulting, was putting on a pied coat instead of a black one. Feeling convinced that age was the cause, I asked to have the specimen as soon as it was dead. Within a month I had it mounted in the Museum.

I remember seeing a very curious Parrot in Ceylon, the property of the late Sir J. E. Tennent. It was an example of *Palæornis torquata*, of a bright yellow, except the red ring round the neck and the black chin; these were also changed, but I forget to what colours.

In my 'Notes on the Ornithology of Ceylon,' you will find mentioned (Ann. Mag. N. H. 2nd ser. xiii. p. 450) a curious variety of *Centropus rufipennis*, Illig. (*C. philippensis*, Cuv.), which I shot at Port Pedro, and should still be in the British Museum. This, I suppose, would be termed an "erythrismus."

In this Museum we have some singular examples, which I will enumerate:—a *Fulica cristata*, pure white; a *Francolinus afer*, having large white patches throughout; and another specimen of the same, in which all the characteristic markings are retained, but changed in colour, and of which I can give the best idea by saying that it is like an English Partridge seen through spectacles of a neutral tint; a *Coturnix communis*, also very similar to the last; a *Columba arquatrix*, mottled with pure white; a Cockatoo, a species of *Licmetis*, from King George's Sound, not figured in Gould's 'Birds of Australia,' which was for a great number of years in the possession of an

old lady in this town, and was, as I am informed, originally white, but latterly became, at each succeeding moult (I can vouch for two myself), darker and darker (when it finally died of old age, it looked as if it had been drawn down a very dirty chimney); three Larks, *Megalophonus cinereus*, of a dark cream-coloured white, the heads and shoulder-patches still red, but much paled; a *Pycnonotus capensis*, changed to a smoky-white, the wing- and tail-quills being lightest; a *Crithagra sulphurata*, nearly all bright yellow; a female *Chalcites klaasi*, which is a most interesting example, all the brown bars being changed to white, the brilliant green bars remaining; two specimens of *Aptenodytes chrysocome*, white, more or less marked with black, but with the bright yellow crests unchanged; a *Spheniscus demersus* (the only one I ever saw thus) having the normal black markings, but the blue back changed to white, finely and sparingly mottled with black; finally, two examples of *Procellaria gigantea*, of the permanent race which occurs to the north-west, as I have before noted (B. S. Afr. p. 360), extending occasionally to Australia according to Dr. Bennett*—these have a few sooty feathers occurring here and there.

Now what I deduce from these observations (and I could name many more) is, that in whatever manner the change is brought about (and I believe it to be caused by weakness), the general rule is:—that black or dark blue changes to white, and white to black; green to yellow, and red to light brown; reddish-brown to cream-colour, and blackish-brown to very pale brown. Exceptions, of course, will be found; but I look upon “albinismus,” “melanismus,” and “erythrismus” as one and the same thing, and we ought to have a comprehensive name for it.

I have never sought for instances of albinism for this Museum, and indeed have rejected many specimens of it; but here are no less than *seventeen* enumerated; and if this were not a purely ornithological journal, I could mention nearly as many similar cases from the class *Mammalia*.

I am, &c.,

E. L. LAYARD.

* [Qu. ‘Gatherings of a Naturalist,’ pp. 76, 77:—ED.]

August, 1869.

SIR,—Having been recently engaged in a study of the African Swallows, the results of which I hope shortly to lay before your readers, I discovered in the collection of Viscount Walden a specimen of that rare species *Hirundo nigrita*, G. R. Gray (Gen. B. pl. xx.) (*Atticora nigrita*, Hartl. Orn. Westafr. p. 25). This I feel sure must be regarded as the type of a new genus, for which I beg leave to propose the name of *Waldenia*, as an acknowledgment of the services rendered to ornithology by Lord Walden.

WALDENIA, gen. nov.

Rostrum robustum, elongatum, apicem versus compressum, dextro decurvato, gonyde vix ascendente, setis brevibus ad basin narium paucis; naribus oblongatis margine superiore membrana obtectis.

Alæ longæ, remige primo quartum æquante, secundo longissimo, tertio quam primus longiore.

Cauda brevis, rectricibus duodecim, externarum pogonio interno graduatim apicem versus attenuato, externis paulo productis.

Pedes robusti, tarsis scutellatis digitis lateralibus æquilongis, hallucem vix æquantibus.

Typus, WALDENIA NIGRITA (G. R. Gray).

The only African genera at all nearly allied to *Waldenia* are *Atticora* and *Hirundo*; but *Atticora* has round nostrils, and no overhanging membrane; *Hirundo* has this membrane, but then the first primary is the longest, whereas in *Waldenia* the second is. This fact, in connexion with the large robust feet, seems to show that the habits of the latter are more arboreal than aerial.

I am, &c.,

R. B. SHARPE.

Jardine Hall, 11 September, 1869.

Sir,—I have just been reading Mr. Harting's interesting paper on *Anarhynchus frontalis* in the last number of 'The Ibis' (pp. 304–310).

Some time since, I received from new Zealand two specimens of this bird, in both of which the bill is turned to the right, similarly to that figured in the woodcut. My own opinion is,

that the curve to the right is perfectly regular, and not a malformation, and that it will probably be found subservient to some part of the natural economy of the species, of which we are yet ignorant. In my collection I have placed the bird between *Strepsilas* and *Charadrius*, taking *C. hiaticula* as typical of the last; but I must say that I have not yet closely examined them.

Yours, &c.,

WM. JARDINE.

12th September 1869.

SIR,—Professor Huxley has submitted to my examination two skins of “a species of *Campanero*” obtained by Mr. Charles B. Brown “near the Arapu river, one day’s journey from Mount Roraima,” in Demerara. They turn out to belong to *Chasmorhynchus variegatus*, and thus prove that the Venezuelan species, concerning which I have before written (*Ibis*, 1866, p. 406), extends into the highlands of British Guiana—an interesting fact in geographical distribution. In a letter accompanying the specimens Mr. Brown says:—“At midday this bird utters its cry, which resembles the sound produced by the blow of a hammer, and is not unlike the cry of the *Campanero* or Bell-bird, only harsher. The eye is large and black; and the throat is capable of great expansion, by means of three or four muscles.”

I am, &c.,

P. L. SCLATER.

14th September, 1869.

SIR,—During a recent visit to the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes at Paris, I had an opportunity of examining the Owl which was brought from Abyssinia by MM. Petit and Dillon and was subsequently described and figured by MM. Des Murs and Prévost (*Rev. Zool.* 1846, p. 242, and ‘*Voyage en Abyssinie*,’ pl. iii.) as the type of their *Bubo dilloni*. I find this species to be identical with that subsequently described and figured by Sir Andrew Smith (*Ill. Zool. S. Afr.* ii. pl. 70) under the name of *B. capensis*; but as this name was probably founded on the *Strix capensis* of Daudin (*Tr. Orn.* ii. p. 209), published in 1800, it ought in that case to take precedence, and *B. dilloni* sink into a synonym. The example obtained by MM. Petit and Dillon is the only one I have ever seen from any locality north of the equator.

M. Charles Marin, the intelligent taxidermist of the Museum at Lille, was so good as to show me yesterday a very fine adult female of *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, which he had just mounted for a gentleman who has a collection of stuffed birds near that town. This Pelican was shot on the 31st of August last in the marsh of Wingle, near Courrière, in the Pas de Calais; and although the locality is at a considerable distance from the sea, the stomach of the bird contained shrimps and small crabs in an almost entire state, as well as a few small fish. As the specimen showed no marks of having been kept in confinement, I think its occurrence so far northwards is worthy of record.

Many years since, the late Mr. Frederic Strange (whose accuracy as an observer of the habits of Australian and New-Zealand birds is still remembered by his friends) informed me that the easiest way of catching the Weka-Rail (*Ocydromus australis*) was for the fowler, after stationing himself very quietly in one of the haunts of this species, to wait for the appearance of a bird, and then to hold a piece of bright red cloth near to the ground in its sight. It would immediately run up, and approach so close to the cloth that the fowler, by making a quick stroke with his right hand, could easily capture it while its attention was absorbed by the red cloth in his left. This account so singularly resembles that given by Hoffmann of the mode of capturing the extinct Mauritian bird, which is quoted in M. Alphonse Milne-Edwards's most interesting paper on *Aphanapteryx imperialis* (*suprà*, p. 258), that it seems desirous that so curious a coincidence of habit between the two birds should not be lost sight of.

I am, &c.,

J. H. GURNEY.

London, 27 Sept. 1869.

SIR,—I am returned to England from China, by way of Japan, California, and the Pacific Railroad, and am fortunate enough to find that most of the specimens collected in the island of Hainan (*Ibis*, 1868, p. 353) are also arrived safely. I am now working at the birds, and hope to be able to contribute a paper upon them to your next number. I have some interesting novelties.

I am, &c.,

ROBERT SWINHOE.

We believe that we are not abusing the confidence of Mr. George Robert Gray when we announce, as we do with the greatest pleasure, that that veteran ornithologist has in the press a 'Hand-List of Birds,' the first part of which is expected to appear shortly. We understand that it is intended to include the scientific name of every species of bird which is to be found recorded, and references to the best figures that have been given of the different species. It will be at once evident that the labour of preparing such a work must of necessity be enormous; and accordingly no one will be surprised at learning that the spare time of the author has been entirely devoted to it for many years. When it is finished, not the least part of its utility will be that it will form a catalogue for every ornithological collection or Museum in the world.

More than two years ago we mentioned (*Ibis*, 1866, p. 214) that our friend Mr. D. G. Elliot had a Monograph of the *Phasianidæ* in preparation. Various causes have hitherto hindered him from bringing this out—chief among them being that his time was fully occupied by the publication of his 'Birds of North America,' which is now completed, and he at length returns to his former design. We have seen the series of drawings by Mr. Wolf which have been executed for this undertaking, and we can truthfully declare that they are among the best productions of that great master.

We regret extremely that the former and the present number of 'The Ibis' should appear without our customary "Notices of Recent Ornithological Publications"—the more so as the past six months have been unusually prolific in works bearing on our study. Such notices, however, could only have been inserted to the exclusion of original matter which we are sure our readers will join with us in regarding as of greater importance; and we trust in our number for next January to clear off the arrears—heavy though they be.